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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes data from several recent surveys of the Department of Education concerning postsecondary students with disabilities. Surveys represented include the 1995-96 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System survey (1998), and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Narrative, figures, and graphs cover enrollment, support services and accommodations, and postsecondary persistence and attainment. The data indicate that roughly 6 percent of all undergraduates report having a disability, with 29 percent reporting a learning disability; the average age of students with disabilities was 30, compared to 26 for students without disabilities; 98 percent of public institutions enrolled students with disabilities, compared to 63 percent of private 4-year institutions and 47 percent of private 2-year institutions; almost all institutions enrolling students with disabilities reported they provided at least 1 support service or accommodation; and students with disabilities were less likely than other students to have attained a degree after 5 years. Figures and graphs report data on number of undergraduates reporting each disability type; percentage of institutions by type of accommodations offered and institutional characteristics; and percentage of 1989-90 beginning postsecondary students by highest degree attained by 1994, disability status, and institution type. (DB)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

STATS IN BRIEF

POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: ENROLLMENT, SERVICES, AND PERSISTENCE

JUNE 2000

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Stats in Brief

POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: ENROLLMENT, SERVICES, AND PERSISTENCE

June 2000

How do the postsecondary enrollment and attainment patterns of students with disabilities compare to students without disabilities? What types of accommodations do institutions provide students with disabilities? These are among the important questions raised by legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To address these questions, it is useful to examine information provided by both students[1] and institutions[2] on students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions and the types of services institutions provide.[3] Because a number of different surveys are mentioned in this Stats in Brief, it is important to note the particular population that was sampled and the year in which the survey was administered.

Enrollment of students with disabilities

According to the 1995–96 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:96), roughly 6 percent of all undergraduates reported having a disability (not shown in tables). Among 1995–96 undergraduates with a disability, approximately 29 percent reported having a learning disability, and 23 percent reported an orthopedic impairment (figure 1). About 16 percent of students with disabilities reported having a hearing impairment, 16 percent a vision impairment, and 3 percent a speech impairment. In addition, one in five undergraduates with disabilities (21 percent) reported having another "health-related" disability or limitation. [4]

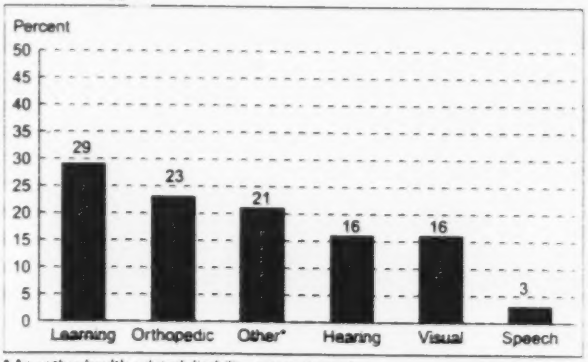
Students with and without disabilities differed somewhat with respect to age and the type of institution they attended in 1995–96. The average age of students with disabilities was 30, compared to an average age of 26 among students without disabilities, and nearly one-quarter of students with disabilities were 40 or over, compared to 12 percent of students without disabilities (not shown in tables). Those with disabilities were less likely to be enrolled in public 4-year colleges and universities (25 versus 32 percent), and more likely to attend either public 2-year institutions or "other" institutions, which include for-profit vocational institutions (not shown in tables). Students with disabilities, however, were about as likely as students without disabilities to attend private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions (14 and 15 percent, respectively).

Support services and accommodations

In a Postsecondary Education Quick Information System (PEQIS) survey conducted in the spring of 1998, a representative sample of 2-year and 4-year postsecondary institutions was asked about the enrollment of students with disabilities in 1996–97 or 1997–98.[5] About three-quarters (72 percent) of the nation's 5,040 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions enrolled students with disabilities in 1996–97 or 1997–98 (table 1). Almost all (98 percent) public 2-year and public 4-year institutions enrolled students with disabilities, compared with 63 percent of private 4-year and 47 percent of private 2-year institutions.

Institutions that enrolled students with disabilities in 1996–97 or 1997–98 were asked whether the institution had provided various special support services or accommodations designed for disabled students to any students with disabilities during 1996–97 or 1997–98. Almost all (98 percent)

Figure 1.—Among 1995–96 under graduates who reported a disability, the percentage reporting each disability type



* Any other health-related disability or impairment.

NOTE: Percentages do not sum to 100 because some students reported multiple disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1999. *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes*, NCES 1999–187. Washington, DC.

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Table 1.—Percentage of 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions that enrolled students with disabilities in 1996–97 or 1997–98, by type of accommodations offered to students with disabilities, by institutional characteristics

Institutional characteristics	Among institutions enrolling students with disabilities, percentage providing various services or accommodations[1]								
	Institutions enrolling students with disabilities	Alternative exam formats or additional time	Tutors to assist with ongoing coursework	Readers, classroom notetakers, or scribes	Registration assistance or priority class registration	Adaptive equipment and technology	Textbooks on tape	Sign language interpreters/ transliterators	Course substitution or waiver
All institutions	**72**	**88**	**77**	**69**	**62**	**58**	**55**	**45**	**42**
Institution type									
Public 2-year	98	94	87	82	77	81	66	66	48
Private 2-year	47	55	51	18	26	30	11	10	15
Public 4-year	98	100	82	93	83	80	85	68	69
Private 4-year	63	90	75	66	53	39	49	29	35
Size of institution									
Less than 3,000	63	82	71	55	48	43	40	28	29
3,000 to 9,999	99	99	90	93	88	86	82	71	61
10,000 or more	100	100	84	[2]100	95	97	93	96	81

[1] In addition to those listed in this table, institutions were also asked about a number of other services and accommodations. This table includes some of the more frequent accommodations institutions reported providing. See source for a complete list.

[2] Statistic is estimated at 99.6 percent, which is rounded to 100 percent for presentation in this table.

NOTE: Information about students with disabilities represents only those students who identified themselves to their institution as having a disability, since these are the only students about whom the institutions could report. Less-than-2-year institutions were not included in this survey.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1999. *An Institutional Perspective on Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*, NCES 1999–046. Washington, DC.

of the institutions that enrolled students with disabilities had provided at least one support service or accommodation (not shown in tables). Most institutions (88 percent) had provided alternative exam formats or additional time, and 77 percent provided tutors to assist with ongoing coursework (table 1). Readers, classroom notetakers, or scribes were provided by 69 percent of the institutions, and registration assistance or priority class registration were provided by 62 percent. Institutions also frequently provided textbooks on tape (55 percent) and adaptive equipment or technology (58 percent), such as assistive listening devices or talking computers. Sign language interpreters/ transliterators were provided by 45 percent of the institutions, and course substitutions or waivers by 42 percent.

Whether various support services or accommodations were provided varied substantially by institutional type and size (table 1). The general pattern was that public 2-year and 4-year institutions were more likely than private 2-year and 4-year institutions to have provided a service or accommodation, and medium and large institutions were more likely than small institutions to have provided a service or accommodation. Large institutions were also more likely than medium institutions to have provided many of the services.

Postsecondary persistence and attainment

Information on the postsecondary persistence and attainment of students with and without disabilities is available from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:90/94), which is a representative sample of students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in the 1989–90 school year.[6] These students were subsequently surveyed in 1992 and 1994.

Among 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students, students with disabilities were less likely than those without disabilities to have attained bachelor's or associate's degrees by 1994 (table 2). While it appears as though they were more likely than students without disabilities to have completed vocational certificates (19 and 12 percent), the difference was not statistically significant. When looking within institutional sector, many differences remained. For example, among those enrolled in public 4-year institutions, 33 percent of students with disabilities had completed bachelor's degrees, compared with 48 percent of students without disabilities. Among students enrolled in public 2-year institutions, similar proportions of students with and without disabilities earned some kind of postsecondary credential, though students without disabilities were more likely to earn associate's degrees (18 versus 7 percent). About 6 percent of both groups who started in public 2-year colleges attained bachelor's degrees.

Because the BPS survey covers a period of five academic years, not all students had completed their degrees by 1994. Therefore, it is also useful to examine the rate of overall persistence, which includes students who either attained a degree or who were still enrolled in 1994. Viewed from this perspective, about 53 percent of students with disabilities had persisted in their postsecondary program. In contrast, 64 percent of students without disabilities had done so (not shown in tables).

Comparability of data

This Stats in Brief reported the results of several National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys that have collected information on students with disabilities. Esti-

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Table 2.—Percentage distribution of 1989-90 beginning postsecondary students according to highest undergraduate degree attained by 1994, by disability status and first institution attended

	None	Certificate	Associate's	Bachelor's
Total	**50**	**13**	**11**	**26**
Does not have a disability	49	12	12	27
Has a disability	59	19	6	16
Public 4-year				
Does not have a disability	44	3	5	48
Has a disability	55	8	3	33
Private, not-for-profit 4-year				
Does not have a disability	28	2	3	67
Has a disability	35	6	2	57
Public 2-year				
Does not have a disability	63	12	18	6
Has a disability	66	21	7	6
Other institutions*				
Does not have a disability	40	45	13	2
Has a disability	59	33	6	2

* Students enrolled in private, for-profit institutions; public less-than-2-year institutions; or private, not-for-profit less-than-4-year institutions.

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1999. *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes*, NCES 1999–187. Washington, DC.

mates of the number of students with disabilities and the types of disabilities reported may differ depending on how the survey question is worded, when it is asked, and to whom the question is addressed (e.g., student, parent, or institution).[7] Estimates may also depend on the timing of the survey relative to implementation of legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

[1] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes*, NCES 1999–187. By Laura Horn and Jennifer Berktold. Larry Bobbitt, project officer. Washington, DC: 1999.

[2] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *An Institutional Perspective on Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*, NCES 1999–046. By Laurie Lewis and Elizabeth Farris. Bernie Greene, project officer. Washington, DC: 1999.

[3] These data should not, however, be interpreted as implying any relationship between the enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions and the accommodations that institutions provide.

[4] These percentages do not sum to 100 because some students reported multiple disabilities.

[5] Institutions' knowledge about student disabilities is based upon student self-report. Some students may report a disability but require no accommodations.

[6] The enrollment patterns of the 1989–90 first-time beginning postsecondary students examined in this section are somewhat different than the patterns of all undergraduate students enrolled in 1995–96, which were described above. Among first-time beginning students in 1989–90, those with disabilities were about as likely as their counterparts without disabilities to attend public 2-year colleges and to attend public 4-year colleges and universities. They were less likely than students without disabilities to attend private, not-for-profit 4-year colleges and universities, and more likely to attend other types of postsecondary institutions. See *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes* (NCES 1999–187) for more information.

[7] One of the reports cited in this issue brief, *Students With Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes* (NCES 1999–187), describes when and how the questions related to disabilities were asked in each of several student surveys.

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The **Stats in Briefs** series presents information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.

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NCES 2000-092

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